



PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Announcement of Emergency Measures

The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis

Prime Minister

19 March 2020

Good afternoon.

Today I am announcing an emergency order which gives the Government of The Bahamas the authority to use temporary, but necessary measures in the country's fight against Covid-19.

Many similar measures are being used around the world to fight this threat to lives and the social and economic well-being of citizens.

This is a global fight.

We must be prepared for battle.

We must and will win this fight here at home.

I assure you of this as prime minister and as a medical doctor.

These very strong measures that are intended to save lives, to protect health and to aggressively attack the spread of COVID-19.

One of these measures is a curfew.

A curfew is hereby imposed extending each night from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. with such exception as may be approved by the Commissioner of Police.

This curfew will commence at 9pm tomorrow (Friday).

We will end the curfew after consultation with medical professionals.

I stress that these are temporary measures.

It is critical that we work together to fight this threat.

We can only win this battle together.

All of us must play a role in protecting our health and the health of our families and loved ones, and the health of others, especially older individuals and others vulnerable to this virus.

The measures to be announced are essential in addressing the spread of this highly contagious virus.

Yesterday, along with members of the Cabinet including the Minister of Health, I toured health care facilities in New Providence that will be used to assess and treat COVID-19 positive patients.

We have made significant strides in the preparedness measures the Government has put in place to deal with this coronavirus.

The Doctor's Hospital facility on Blake Road has been prepared and is ready to accept COVID-19 patients who require treatment.

The facility and the perimeter will be secured by Defence Force personnel.

To boost frontline staff to address the COVID-19 threat, nurses who have completed their training and successfully completed their examinations will be appointed effectively immediately.

I want to reassure Bahamians and residents that our food and medical supplies are well stocked and there is absolutely no need for panic buying or hoarding.

Fuel supplies are also very strong.

Propane gas is well stocked as well.

Our ports will remain open for freight and cargo.

Our airports will remain open.

However, the Government of The Bahamas strongly discourages non-essential domestic and international travel.

Social distancing has been shown to slow the spread of COVID-19.

To encourage social distancing, businesses are being strongly urged to operate with essential staff only and to allow those who can work remotely, to work from their homes.

Members of the Public Service shall work from home, as may be authorized by the Permanent Secretary, maintaining only

essential staff for the performance of essential functions while adhering at all times to social distancing.

As announced by the Minister of Finance in the House of Assembly yesterday, the Government has requested that Water and Sewerage Corporation reconnect all disconnected services for residential customers to ensure personal hygiene is not compromised.

The Government has also directed Water and Sewerage and recommended to BPL to defer payment of bills – for an initial period of three months for residential customers who are diagnosed with the virus, who are in quarantine or who have been laid off.

The Government will cover the cost of those utility bills, as this is an unprecedented situation facing our nation.

The regulations in the proclamation of emergency orders criminalize the deliberate

creation of fake news for the purpose of inciting public fear or panic.

This is an important and necessary provision.

Democratic countries around the world are having difficulties with this issue.

Some individuals are deliberately circulating lies and false information to cause panic, unrest, violence and confusion.

In some countries the creation of malicious fake news has led to killings by those who incited fear and panic.

In our democracy freedom of speech has always come with responsibilities and limits.

For example, if by your words you threaten to kill someone that is a crime in The Bahamas.

Uttering threats of death is illegal.

If by your words you threaten to attack or injure someone that too is a crime in The Bahamas.

Uttering threats of harm is also illegal.

We must be responsible with what we say.

There is now circulating through social media a fake emergency order that was not issued by the Government of The Bahamas.

This was an intentional and malicious attack that could cause panic and harm.

Just as we are fighting a virus that can cause harm we must address a contagion of fear and panic that can cause harm to others.

I plead with Bahamians to play their role to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to the stop the spread of malicious and fake news.

We all have a role to play in this.

Freedom of speech remains with these regulations.

What has been outlawed is the deliberate creation of lies and false information designed to cause harm to others.

There has been a problem in The Bahamas with the creation and spread of malicious fake news for some time.

We face a crisis not seen in the lifetime of most Bahamians.

As a country, as a people of goodwill, we collectively cannot allow devious individuals to make this crisis worse and to harm others.

This crisis is developing daily and the Government of The Bahamas will make adjustments as necessary in the best interest of the public health and safety of the Bahamian people and residents of The Bahamas.

The Government will continue to provide you with regular updates.

I thank all of those on the frontline of this battle for their courage, compassion and dedication to the health, security and well-being of Bahamians and residents.

The orders that I am about to announce are very strong, but they will save lives, which is my greatest responsibility as prime minister.
